

Mains Master

An elusive grand bargain

Context

- US-China relations are defined by a complex mix of competition and cooperation.
- The Biden Administration seeks "responsible competition" with a rising China.
- While there's a need for engagement on global issues, many in the Indian strategic community are wary, fearing the US will prioritize accommodation with China at the expense of allies and partners.

Background

- China's growing economic clout and its attempts to push the US out of Asia have fueled a bipartisan consensus in the US on the need to push back against Beijing.
- However, Republicans advocate a more confrontational approach to roll back Chinese influence, while the Democrats favor measured competition.

USA's Shifting Strategy

- **Engagement Track:** High-level talks between Biden and Xi Jinping, along with Treasury Secretary Yellen's China visit, signal an effort to maintain beneficial economic ties while warning China against dominating emerging tech sectors.
- **Competition Track:** Biden's state visit with Japanese PM Kishida aims to strengthen military-technological cooperation between the two nations Japan is becoming a key part of Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy. Japan's shift from pacifism is a major geopolitical development.

Signs of Sino-American Convergence

- There is a willingness (at least in principle) to engage on both sides, primarily driven by economic interdependencies and the need to address global challenges.

Strategic Possibility of Sino-American Convergence

- A full convergence seems unlikely due to fundamental differences in political systems and strategic goals.
- The US views China's rise as a challenge to its global position, while China seeks greater regional dominance in Asia.

Role in the Indo-Pacific

- This dynamic creates opportunities for countries like India to leverage partnerships, increase strategic autonomy, and assert their influence within the region.

USA's Approach Towards Allies

- Biden's approach focuses on:
 - Deepening established bilateral alliances like the one with Japan.
 - Expanding the AUKUS framework to include Japan to counter China's tech ambitions.
 - Creating new multilateral structures (The Quad, Chip Four alliance) to pool resources and enhance deterrence.
 - Encouraging partnerships amongst US allies to build a security network in Asia.

Does India Need to Be Concerned?

- India needs to be watchful of potential US accommodation with China that might come at the expense of its partners.
- However, the current US strategy offers ample space for India to maneuver through:
 - Greater agency for regional players as the US and China compete.
 - Opportunities to forge partnerships within and outside US-led frameworks.
 - Increased attention and support from the US looking to counter China's influence.

Strategic Options Available to India

- **Strengthen Existing Partnerships:** Deepen existing defense and security cooperation with partners in the Indo-Pacific region, including the US, Japan, Australia, and members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad).
- **Diversify Partnerships:** Build stronger strategic relationships with other regional powers like Vietnam, Indonesia, and South Korea, while exploring avenues of cooperation with European nations concerned about China's dominance.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Cultivate strategic autonomy by balancing partnerships while avoiding overt alignment with any single power bloc. Prioritize India's own national interests and decision-making.
- **Indigenous Defense Development:** Focus on building indigenous defense capabilities to decrease reliance on external powers and increase self-sufficiency.
- **Economic Initiatives:** Pursue regional economic initiatives that reduce dependence on China and promote Indian influence, potentially exploring alternatives to China-led projects like the Belt and Road Initiative.

Way Forward

- **Multilateral Engagement:** Actively participate in multilateral forums and institutions to shape regional norms and standards that reflect India's interests.
- **Maritime Power:** Continue developing India's naval power and capabilities to protect sea lanes of communication and counter Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.
- **Soft Power:** Invest further in enhancing soft power projection through cultural diplomacy, education exchanges, and development assistance in the region.
- **Technology & Innovation:** Prioritize advancement in critical technologies like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and space to maintain strategic and economic competitiveness.

Conclusion

- While the US-China dynamic remains complex and uncertain, it highlights the importance of India:
 - Pursuing strategic autonomy within a shifting geopolitical landscape.
 - Capitalizing on the opportunities provided by US competition with China.
 - Developing an independent and robust foreign policy with a strong focus on the Indo-Pacific.

The climate crisis is not gender neutral

Context

- The climate crisis poses a global threat, with disproportionate and dire consequences for women and girls, especially in developing nations.

Background

- Climate change intensifies existing gender inequalities through its adverse effects on health, livelihoods, and social structures. (UNDP)
- Climate-driven events such as droughts, food insecurity, heat waves, air pollution, and extreme weather place amplified burdens on women, threatening their physical and mental well-being.

Climate Crisis Worsening Gender Injustice

- **Agriculture:** Women play a major role in agriculture, particularly in rural areas. Climate change contributes to reduced crop yields and food insecurity, disproportionately impacting female-led households and increasing their vulnerability to malnutrition and poverty. (FAO)
- **Extreme Weather:** Climate-induced disasters lead to a disturbing rise in gender-based violence. Disasters also limit access to safe water, adding to women and girls' domestic and caregiving burdens. Women are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster. (UNDP)
- **Health:**
 - Prolonged heatwaves carry severe health risks for pregnant women (premature birth, eclampsia), infants, and the elderly. (WHO)
 - Air pollution poses a grave threat:
 - Each 10 micrograms per cubic meter increase in PM2.5 raises lung cancer risk by 9%, cardiovascular deaths by 3%, and stroke by 8%. (Indian Cohort Studies)

Implications

- Climate impacts vary based on complex factors including gender, socioeconomic status, and location. Robust research is needed to address the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and target support efforts. (IPCC)

Solutions to Climate Crisis Flows to Gender Justice

- **Empowerment:** Studies show that when women farmers have equal access to resources as their male counterparts, yields increase by 20-30%. Tribal and rural women are vital for conservation; their knowledge and leadership are essential for localized climate solutions. (FAO)
- **Data-Driven Policy:** Sex-disaggregated data is pivotal to understanding the specific ways climate change affects women and girls, enabling the creation of focused adaptation policies.



Prioritizing Heat & Water Resilience: Mitigating the impacts of heatwaves and water scarcity not only saves lives but also specifically addresses the magnified risks for women. This includes providing heat shelters, early warning systems, and water infrastructure with a gender-equity focused lens.

- **Participatory Approaches:** Solutions are more effective and sustainable when women and women's collectives are central to the planning and implementation of climate action at the community level.

Corrective Steps to Fight Climate Crisis

- **Gender-Sensitive Policy:** Climate action plans at all levels (national to local) must explicitly address the magnified impact on women and actively seek to reverse gender-based disparities deepened by the climate crisis.
- **Shifting the Narrative:** Women must be seen as powerful agents of change in resilience strategies instead of being solely portrayed as victims. Highlighting women's knowledge, skills, and experiences brings vital perspectives to the forefront of climate solutions.

Conclusion

Dr. Swaminathan's analysis underscores the urgent link between the climate crisis and the struggle for gender justice. To build a resilient future and achieve the Paris Agreement goals, proactive and gender-inclusive action is imperative. Without empowering women and addressing their unique vulnerabilities, climate action remains incomplete and ineffective

Prelims Booster

Peter Higgs, who proposed existence of 'God particle', dies

- Nobel prize-winning physicist Peter Higgs, known for proposing the existence of the "God particle" or Higgs boson, has passed away at 94.
- Mr. Higgs' groundbreaking 1964 theory on the Higgs boson explained how subatomic particles acquire mass, a key aspect of the Standard Model in physics.
- The discovery of the Higgs boson at the Large Hadron Collider in 2012 confirmed Mr. Higgs' theory, leading to his Nobel Prize in Physics in 2013.
- Edinburgh University praised Mr. Higgs as a gifted scientist whose work has inspired countless researchers and will continue to influence future generations.
- The Higgs boson, a fundamental particle in particle physics, is associated with the Higgs field, believed to give mass to other subatomic particles.
- Key points about the Higgs boson:
 - Predicted by the Standard Model of particle physics, the Higgs boson's existence was anticipated as part of the comprehensive theory describing fundamental particles and their interactions.
 - Discovered in 2012 by the ATLAS and CMS experiments at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN, confirming its existence.
 - The Higgs field interacts with particles, imparting mass based on their interactions, with stronger interactions leading to greater mass.
 - Crucial for understanding the universe, the Higgs boson's discovery confirmed how particles acquire mass and provided insights into the early universe.
 - Ongoing research focuses on studying the Higgs boson's properties to deepen our understanding of matter and the universe's fundamental nature.

Main inShorts

Forecast for food inflation

Forecast for Food Inflation in India

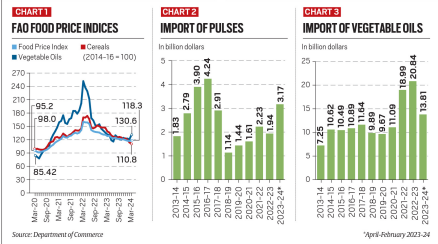
Reasons for Softening Food Inflation:

1. Easing of Global Prices - Making Imports More Feasible
2. Likely La Niña Event - Allows RBI to Cut Interest Rates

Key Data Points:

FAO Food Price Indices

[Chart showing decline in Food Price Index, Cereals Index, and Vegetated Oils Index]



Import of Pulses

[Chart showing increase in pulse imports from \$1.79 billion in 2017-18 to \$2.91 billion in 2023-24]

Import of Vegetated Oils

[Chart 3 showing increase in vegetated oil imports from \$10.92 billion in 2013-14 to \$20.64 billion in 2023-24]

Impact of Ukraine-Russia Conflict:

- Disrupted wheat supplies, but new crop from Russia and Ukraine expected to stabilize by July-August

Role of La Niña:

- Could impact weather patterns, but overall manageable impact
- Allows RBI to consider cutting interest rates

Implications for RBI:

- Softening food inflation provides opportunity to cut interest rates
- This can help support economic growth, a key concern for the central bank

In Conclusion , there is a positive outlook for food inflation in India, driven by easing global prices and the potential impact of a La Niña event, which should provide the RBI with room to cut interest rates and support the overall economic recovery.

Gudi Padma

- Gudi Padma is a spring festival marking the lunisolar new year for Marathi and Konkani Hindus in Maharashtra, Goa, and Daman at the beginning of the month of Chaitra.
- The celebration includes colorful rangoli decorations, a special gudi dvaja adorned with flowers, mango, neem leaves, sugar crystal garlands, and upturned silver or copper vessels.
- Festivities involve street gatherings, dancing, and enjoying festive foods.
- Known as Gudhi Padma in Maharashtra, the day is referred to as Padvo in Konkani, Pādyaṁi in Telugu, and Yugadi in Kannada.
- Telugu Hindus celebrate Ugadi, while Sindhi people observe Cheti Chand.
- While Gudi Padma is significant for Marathi and Konkani Hindus, other regions like Gujarat celebrate their new year during Diwali, and Vaisakhi is popular among Hindus and Buddhists in Southeast Asia.

Navy chief inaugurates new facilities at Karwar naval base

- Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar inaugurated a 350m long major pier for Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) and residential accommodations at Naval Base Karwar as part of Project Seabird Phase IIA.
- The new OPV Pier can berth OPVs, large survey vessels, and mine countermeasure vessels, providing various shore-based services and amenities.
- The residential facilities include towers for married and single officers, along with Type-II accommodation for Defence civilians.
- Once completed, Project Seabird Phase IIA will house around 10,000 personnel, boosting the local economy and industrial growth, with the Naval Air Station expected to enhance tourism in North Karnataka and South Goa.
- The project has created thousands of direct and indirect jobs, aligning with the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative by sourcing over 90% of materials domestically.

The number of migrants who died in a shipwreck off Djibouti

• Djibouti, located on the Horn of Africa, is a predominantly French- and Arabic-speaking country known for its dry shrublands, volcanic landscapes, and Gulf of Aden beaches.

• The country is home to Lake Assal, one of the saltiest bodies of water globally, situated in the low-lying Danakil Desert.

• Nomadic Afar people have settlements near Lake Abbe, a saltwater body with unique chimney-like mineral formations.

